MUSIC MOTIONS: ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY & FOUNDER'S NARRATIVE

Archival Context and Rediscovery

After the closure of Music Motions, many company materials—including film elements, posters, and documentation—were placed in storage. When the storage facility was later lost, much of the original archive disappeared and was presumed gone. Decades later, scattered elements began to reappear through private sales, online marketplaces, and video sharing platforms. Prints, negatives, posters, and other artifacts gradually resurfaced.

The present Music Motions Archive represents an active effort to locate, document, and preserve those surviving materials. Film elements have been scanned where possible and related documentation assembled to reconstruct the company's history between 1984 and 1987. While not all original materials have been recovered, the archive provides a definitive historical record of Music Motions' productions, distribution activities, and technical experiments during a brief but innovative period in the evolution of music video exhibition.

Timeline of Operations

- **1984:** Company founded in New York. First theatrical "Music Zap" released (Carly Simon).
- **1985:** Catalog expands with major artists. Large-scale theatrical distribution of Bowie & Jagger "Dancing in the Street". Original production "Wall Street Strut" completed.
- **1986:** Later projects including Cyndi Lauper and The Lover Speaks.
- **1987:** Music Motions ceases operations.

The "Music Zap" Format: Technical & Promotional Standards

What distinguished a Music Motions distribution from standard television broadcast was a rigorous, highly specialized post-production and promotional pipeline designed to elevate music videos into true theatrical "short subjects."

- **Aspect Ratio Conversion:** While most licensed content was originally shot on 35mm film, it was framed for a 4:3 television aspect ratio. Music Motions undertook the complex process of repositioning the framing for cinema screens, typically converting the prints to a 1.85:1 theatrical widescreen ratio, and in two specific instances, expanding the frame to a 2.39:1 CinemaScope aspect ratio.

- **Cinematic Formatting:** To transform the pieces into self-contained "mini-movies," custom head titles and tail credits were generated and cut into the prints. This extended the runtimes and served to formally celebrate the directors, cinematographers, and production crews who were rarely credited on broadcast television.
- **Audio Engineering:** To meet the acoustic demands of major theater chains, the audio for these releases was remixed in 5.1 Dolby Stereo. While these specialized mixes added substantial—and in most cases, unrecouped—production costs, they were considered strictly necessary for the immersive cinema experience.
- **Theatrical Marketing:** Beyond the physical prints, Music Motions operated a localized distribution network. Exhibitions were supported by dedicated promotional campaigns centering on original theatrical posters, ad snipes, and coordinated PR efforts linking local cinemas with regional radio stations and record stores.

THE FOUNDER'S NARRATIVE: A FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT

By Tom Hayes

The Pilot Project: Carly Simon

It was early Spring 1984, and I had just finished a business plan to produce and distribute music videos for movie theaters. Within two weeks I had a partner, but no connections to either the music or movie exhibition industries. I had the money, but nowhere to go; nobody returned calls. On the piano bench of my minuscule studio apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan was a piece of sheet music I had been trying to learn called "*That's the Way I Always Heard It Should Be,*" music by Carly Simon with lyrics by Jacob Brackman. After studying the cover, it occurred to me that the lyricist may have been a movie columnist at *Esquire* Magazine when my father had been Editor. I had never met the man, but I figured why not cold-call? LA telephone information had his number, so I called, and Jacob Brackman answered.

I explained about this new company I started called Music Motions, and that we needed a pilot project. He told me he had just finished producing four music videos for Carly Simon, and the fourth was unfinished. Maybe we could pay for finishing it, and that could be the pilot project. Within two hours of that call, I was sitting in Carly Simon's living room explaining my concept. She signed a letter of intent and the rest is history. The gorgeous poster photo is taken by Lynn Goldsmith and the romantic interest with Carly is co-star Richard Garcia, one of a pair of identical fashion model twins who owned the Munson Diner where we shot.

Breaking the Ice: The 10 White Jumpsuits

With Carly Simon's "It Happens Everyday" in theaters, the race to expand the catalog was on. We had decided what we were promoting were not music videos, but a derivative on 35mm film that should be branded "Music Zaps." Although a few articles in *Billboard* and *Variety* caused some reaction, we were still frustrated by the difficulty to break the ice in the record industry.

Something extra was needed, so a foolproof promotion targeting 10 record companies in Manhattan that were not returning calls was devised. A street vendor was contracted to make 10 white paper jump suits with black stenciled lettering that spelled "I've been Zapped!". Each was carefully folded and placed in a large 35mm film can. On top was a roll of red tape and a small telephone handset with Music Motions' phone number affixed to the dialer. Each was hand-delivered to the appropriate music video promotion executive. Within three hours, every recipient called to schedule an appointment.

One of the first meetings was with Arista Records' video promotion executives Peter Barron and Abbey Konowitch. My colleague Pam Henning and I were shown a rough cut of their latest video production "Dynamite!" by Jermaine Jackson, which was directed by Bob Giraldi. Giraldi had just finished the iconic "Beat It!" music video by Jermaine's brother, Michael Jackson, and was red hot. Since the production met our technical requirements of originating on 35mm film with all sound elements available for a Dolby Stereo mix, we agreed to make it our next project.

Building the Catalog: Twisted Sister to Sade

We took a front-page ad out in *Variety* announcing definite upcoming Music Zaps, and ones we thought we were going to distribute. At the Billboard Video Music Convention in Los Angeles, I made contact with Arnie Holland of RCA Video Productions, who essentially opened up RCA's entire catalog to us. He pushed Elvis Presley's "Blue Suede Shoes," but we ultimately decided Rick Springfield's "Bop Til You Drop" was a better bet. The music video was mega-director David Fincher's first directing job, shot entirely on 35mm film. Much of his crew came from George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic. I was also introduced to Marty Callner, who showed me a campy spoof he directed called "We're Not Gonna Take It" by Twisted Sister, which was available as a 35mm negative. The catalog was expanding rapidly.

Epic Records soon invited us to distribute country artist Ricky Skaggs' "Country Boy," directed by Martin Kahan, which featured a cameo appearance from Mayor Ed Koch. Epic subsidiary Portrait then offered Sade. The music video had been shot in Super 16mm (probably at the UK playback speed of 25fps) by director Julien Temple, and the negative sent was an assembly of a much longer version. We relocated to an office building in the heart of the New York film district and hired ace film editor Matt Mallinson to re-edit the Sade production to match the commercial song length. The Super 16mm version was blown up to 35mm, and a Dolby Stereo mix was made at Sound One, adding police sirens for the surround channels. It premiered at MovieLand on Broadway with a huge banner.

Quality vs. Quantity: Barbra Streisand

Columbia Records called us up one day and said Barbra Streisand would like to be in our catalogue. Streisand had produced her latest video called "Emotion," on 35mm film. She had

been working with Technicolor West Coast and had very specific timing for a certain shade of pink used in her titles and credits. The problem was Technicolor West Coast's price per print was double what Technicolor East Coast was charging. Streisand told us if we could match her shade of pink at Technicolor East Coast, we could make our prints there. After staying up all night checking print after print, I thought we had a pretty close match, but she didn't agree. We ended up making prints on the West Coast, but not as many, booking flagship theaters in Century City in her backyard. I think in the end she was pleased because our poster is up on her website.

The Global Stage: Live Aid & FedEx

Music Motions' original business model relied on monthly theater rentals, but it became clear a national sponsor was the ultimate solution. We retained West Nally Music (WNM), a sponsorship sales company, who announced they had secured AT&T, Eastman Kodak, and Federal Express as sponsors for the upcoming global Live Aid concert. This positioned Music Motions as the exclusive theatrical distributor for the official Live Aid video: David Bowie and Mick Jagger's "Dancing in the Street."

After the concert, the original 35mm film and audio elements were shipped to New York, where Music Motions prepared 5,000 release prints for distribution across the U.S., Canada, the U.K., and parts of France. The final Music Zap opened with a 30-second Kodak spot and concluded with a 10-second call-to-action urging viewers to dial AT&T's toll-free donation line. Release prints were manufactured at the Technicolor lab on the third floor of our building. A truck drove them three blocks east to a FedEx office, where FedEx used the distribution as a beta test for a new boxing and handling service. Most shipments arrived by 10:30 the next morning. Just one year after launching, Music Motions had put itself on the map, proving the sponsorship-driven business model.

Technical Feats: A-ha's "Take On Me"

In the middle of the "Dancing in the Street" project, a call came in from Warner Brothers about a new Norwegian band they were promoting called A-ha. The video combined rotoscope animation with live action, directed by Steve Barron. The famous glass-breaking scene—only 18 frames long—was the most difficult technical obstacle in the conversion because "Take On Me" had originally been made for television. For a theatrical release, very expensive hand-cut mattes on an Oxberry animation stand with an optical printer had to be used. Balazs, a Hungarian optical effects artist at Cineric, animated the mattes on his optical bench for a cost of $3,500.

We decided to also create a CinemaScope version to increase booking potential, reframing images from 4:3 to an anamorphic 2.39:1 aspect ratio. The cinemization was completed with a Dolby Stereo sound mix that added theatrical sound effects in the surround channels, including revving motorcycles and glass breaking.

The Final Act

As operations expanded, a new 2,500 SF loft space was secured in the garment district. Cyndi Lauper announced she was making a new video called "True Colors" from Epic Records. We

pitched Eastman Kodak in Rochester, who agreed to sponsor 1,000 screens. Because we were part of Epic's marketing plan, we were a forethought instead of an afterthought, allowing us to ask Cyndi to record personalized cinema chain introductions.

Toward the end of Music Motions' run, we were running out of gas as a company. Our final distributions included titles like "No More I Love You's" by The Lover Speaks for A&M records, distributed to 100 screens in ten markets.